



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary Sept 2002

Welcome to the 12th Summary of NRT postings. I must apologise, as I did not realise that I was actually a month behind myself so you will hopefully be getting 2 summaries this month!

The month started with a continuation of last month's postings.

Putting old Fred to bed! (And Freda's!)

Lynda Coles wrote, two thoughts after the last few entries. 1. If I start a list of the requirements of a good TC, I'm sure that others will continue/correct it.

a) A good ringer b) A regular attendee c) A motivator with the ambition to ensure that, as many people as there are ropes attend for Sunday services. Over to you...

2. The tendency until say 30 years ago was for Fred to be 'hatched, matched and dispatched' at the same church. The population is much more mobile now, and I know very few people who still live close to their place of birth – I know relatively few who live in the same town for 20 years. I would guess that by the nature of things, without positive strategy, there would be few 'Young Fred's' becoming TC now and still being in post 30 years down the line.

And replying to an earlier posting about women TC's - It certainly was not written tongue-in-cheek. I now know of a fair few women TC's, but 25 years ago, when she would have had to enter office to achieve 'Freda' status, I doubt if there were many in the UK at least.

Caroline Birdsell states, Fred's & Freda's all have their places. In the experience of our team (ringing 4 churches, 1 practice night) when I moved to a hamlet on the outskirts of the parish 4 years ago the team was in an embryonic state - new augmentation, new learner ringers being taught by generous time-giving helpers from other towers. TC (now middle-aged) had been chiming the old 3 since childhood (& father & grandfather before him) but none had experience of full circle ringing previously. I was elected deputy TC within 4 months - a year later TC wanted to hand over completely to me - I refused saying my job was more of RM (teaching & training) and we needed him as TC (the people's contact) as he knew the local village community - Through severe arthritis, he now does very little ringing but is always there for practices, & a very useful "stander" for novices, & an exceedingly necessary "ear-to-the-ground" on local matters. I will also say that

with TC not being a regular church- but a very regular pub-attende & me being the other way round means that our personal contacts within the community covers much more ground than if it were only one of us. Don't dismiss OF just for the sake of change - look at all possibilities and all sections of the community (both ringing & non-ringing) first. Public relations outside of the ringing chamber is as important as good personal relationships in it and there are other job titles to use and/or invent - what about an ex-officio position for life - doesn't have to actually DO anything but the title is there - or maybe president or patron.... I'm sure there are ways of keeping OF in the tower without creating any hurts.

Richard Pargeter adds, when my father was up at Cambridge in the late 1930's, one Kitty Willers was in charge at Trumpington. When I went up in 1973, she was still in charge. (And she still ran a good practice.) Perhaps things were different over 60 years ago??

Continuing on the Fixed Period for Tower Offices theme.

Peter Wenham writes, we, too, have an annual meeting, with one of our Churchwardens in the Chair. The agenda can be anything ringing-wise. I have suggested more than once that a change of TC might be a good thing but have been shouted down. Flattering, but after ten years, I've still got the job. BUT - the gang knows that I wouldn't be miffed if someone else wants a go and meantime I am trying to develop certain individuals so that they might decide to give it a try.

Paul Wilkinson replying to John Preston writes, this is precisely the point of the item that started this debate isn't it? It is very difficult for us to stand against the incumbent, even if they have stated that they want to stand down. Any such action is seen as confrontation and we don't do confrontation, do we? If we have a time limit this problem is avoided and the outgoing officer can stand again at a later date, so possibly extending their tenure but coming back refreshed and eager (hopefully).

And in reply to Karl Grave, I think that there is too much of an assumption being made in this and other messages that a long-lasting TC is automatically a bad thing. It probably is but not necessarily so and it is unfair to those people who have done a good job for many years to say so.

Lynda Coles, replies, I hoped that somebody would make this point, which was, indeed, part of my original. The TC I referred to was excellent, but that in itself was a large part of the problem of succession, which I'm sure, got progressively more difficult over the years. Nobody wanted to step into his shoes, knowing that they would be unable to make such a good job of it. 35 years is a hard act to follow. He was a kindly person, and would have been a wise counselor to whoever his successor was. I didn't meet him until shortly before he died, but I feel sure that if he had been TC for only 5 years or whatever initially, he would have been every bit as committed to the band in some other capacity, perhaps taking another stint or two in the driving seat over the years.

John Harrison writes, Heather Peachy and Peter Humphrey are unconvinced about the merits of rotating officers. I don't know whether they have experienced it. Joan Kemp has, and is in favour. So have I. We introduced a 3-year rule for all officers in 1980, when the previous TC stood down after 15 years. His predecessor had done at least 30 (our records only go back to 1934). In both cases, for the last couple of years, the incumbent had been incapable of doing the job, but was voted back in because no one wanted to offend him - he relied on his deputy to run things. But for an influx of new people, the band was at such low ebb that it could easily have folded. I took over as the first in 1980. 20 years ago we had someone who had been in charge for years and was past it. A couple of times he was voted back in because no one wanted to offend him. In the end, the Rector persuaded him to stand down, we made him foreman emeritus and presented him with a certificate. He was very happy and came along as an ordinary ringer until he had to give up because of ill health a few years before he died. I was voted in as the obvious successor and returned unopposed for two more years. When I stood down 3 years later, there was no one obvious to succeed me, and had it not been for the 3 year rule I am sure I would have been persuaded to carry on and on and on long past the time when I was giving of my best. (Running an active tower is hard work if you put yourself into it.) Instead, we have had a succession of people, some better than others, but each has contributed new ideas, and many have developed through the experience. I am convinced we are a healthier band because we stimulate turnover and give new people the opportunity to serve and gain experience. People often move from one post to another, and several of us have done more than one stint over the years, so talent is not wasted. We do have an exception clause in our constitution, but it has only been invoked in 5 out of over 90 elections (4 posts x 23 years).

Opportunities to Call

John Harrison in reply to a point made by Stuart Palin, says, we try to get people to start calling call changes shortly after they can ring them well, normally before they start plain hunting, especially young ringers, to help build their confidence.

Alison Barnett adds, we have certainly found that this helps learners who are still a little shaky in the understanding of called changes. (Especially as when we joined with other towers everyone does it differently!) We start off asking them just to call a certain bell up to the back then we get back to rounds again. When the confidence has risen, we do the reverse, (from the back to rounds) and then start getting into queens for example then out of queens. 1 step at a time.

Rebecca George replies, this works better with some learners than others. I tried this with a recent learner of mine to try to improve ropesight - she would need to be able to see the order of the bells to get it back to rounds. Unfortunately it did not help. She was also a learner who struggled with call changes. If I had tried it while she was struggling it would have worked even less. Perhaps the learners that would benefit from this practice most are those that would struggle with it most?

Duties of a TC

Lynda Coles writes, nobody has added to my list of qualifications to be a TC. D) A reliable key holder. E) A good teacher of Handling. F) A good teacher of the stages from there to PBD. G) A good team Builder. H) A good recruiter. I) A good delegator. J) A good communicator with the incumbent.

Rodney Stevenson writes, I would even take some of these out, as I believe by far the greatest asset of any TC is PR expertise, whether this is to ringers or others. Maybe it is better called liaison? Not something to be learned: a natural talent I think! I'd even remove some of the listed duties, as I see very practical benefits to the tutor not having to run the practice as well. But then, I suspect few of our towers are in the fortunate position that we can appoint someone who will possess more than a few of our ideal requirements? We can attempt to spread the load however, thus avoid early 'burnout'.

Catherine Lewis replies, surely we must include the ability to run ringing sessions effectively (Unless this is done by someone else) i.e. without wasting any time, developing people's skills (unless they specifically don't want them developed!), using people's skills and keeping the output sound reasonably good for practice and even better on Sundays. (I wonder why TC's should, by definition, only be able to teach to PBD!)

Lynda Coles replies, I only stipulate the ability to teach up to PBD I suppose because I see that as being the level at which the pupil leaves

primary and goes on to secondary education. With the ability to read and cope with basic math it is possible to educate oneself if self motivated. It would be much more difficult to teach oneself to read. Secondary education is far preferable, of course!

Tim Ford writes, Peter Wenham said that the key to an effective TC is delegation. Delegation is fine, but must be used carefully, or you very soon pick up a reputation for not doing anything yourself! Personally, I would rate the ability to lead as a prime quality - this includes delegation, as well as time management, being able to inspire people, being assertive when necessary and of course many other things. I don't think a TC has to be able to ring all sorts of methods, as long as he/she doesn't allow this to hold the rest of the band back - a case for delegation!

Sponsored Ringing Centres

Gail Cater writes, The CC Ringing Centres Committee invites applications for grants to Sponsored Ringing Centres under the scheme funded by the Worshipful Company of Founders as outlined in Ringing World 1999 page 870. Only a limited number of grants of up to £1200 are still available so early application is advised. The grants provide a splendid opportunity for a tower to equip itself with training resources such as a simulator and video equipment, and to train its trainers, so that it can make a big contribution to the development of ringing in its area. If you would like to discuss the possibility of your tower becoming a ringing centre and receiving a grant, please contact Gail Cater, Tel: 01962 856112 or email: gailcater@8salters.freeserve.co.uk

Scaredy Cats Outing!

Lynda Coles writes, we organised an outing yesterday which was very much enjoyed by some newcomers to our district. The idea came to me after the recent discussion following my Mick, Nell and the Fairy query. The invitation only went out two weeks before the date, as we wanted to catch any candidates in time for some other District events. 4 learners able to ring only rounds/called changes came, plus 5 able to ring Bob Doubles, and 6 good ringers to stand behind, organize, and firm up the band. At each tower, only rounds, cc and plain hunt was rung, apart from one method at each for the helpers. The two-hour lunch break flew by. The day was exactly what I would have wanted my early experience to be. We all wore name labels. *(If anyone wants to see a copy of the invitation that went out, please ask. ALB)* *Catherine Lewis* replies, sounds really good. I'm sure you're right about the need. Also about sticking to relatively simple stuff - very wise! Except didn't you need 8 good ringers for those towers? So each bell either has a good ringer on the rope, or one to lurk behind it trying to

help the person on it do even better. Or perhaps you mostly rang 6 - not something I'd plan to do on an 8, because I think it's a waste of potential 8-bell ringing time for someone else.

You don't say how many people you invited to finish up with a number you felt you could cope with. One caveat, I think, for this kind of thing is NOT to issue a general invitation to a branch/district say. Personal invites are best, unless you make it clear that "some people may have to be turned away this time - and we'll do another if there's demand". The wrong balance of people can, easily ruin the quality of ringing and benefit gained on an outing. It needs to be possible to place each band in such a way that the ringing stands a chance of being reasonably good, while not having anyone standing out for too long.

Lynda Coles replies, because of the very short notice, we simply waited to see what the response was before finalizing helpers. The balance, in the event, was ideal, both expertise-wise and socially. We'll decide how to cope with the over-subscription when it happens next year! Although I take Catherine's point about the benefit of personal invitation, obviously the event, by definition was selective. And I hope that a few newcomers who saw notice of the event, but perhaps could not come on the day, will have felt a sense of inclusion in the District (which took me at least 3 years).

TC's Teaching Methods.

Peter Wenham writes, Following the Sparsholt training weekend I have maintained contact with three of the students. Possibly the most interesting information from this correspondence is that all three comment about how their TC is trying to progress them too quickly, to move them on to the next stage before they consider that they are fully competent in their present achievements. One wonders, in how many towers is this happening? It could lose us learners!

Peter Harrison adds, I have seen it happen first hand. While I was a very keen learner and I did want to be pushed into learning all these new (to me) methods, others around me didn't want to, and they did feel they were being pushed too hard. A couple of them have given up. While this was not the main reason, I know it did count to it. Maybe TC's should just ask "How are you going with <method x>?" to see if the learner is happy or not. All it may take is a few words to increase the learners' confidence so they know they are ready to move on to the next method. You never know if you never ask! *Catherine Lewis* writes, I'm sure it does lose learners, but what worries me about it almost more is that it generates a nasty noise outside. We, as a body, do need to be very careful about this. In general if the sound is good and rhythmical the public are far more likely to accept it. We need the culture where we

almost always have good striking. Rough ringing gets everyone in bad habits. How often one sees a band placed in such a way that it's clear before anyone pulls off that the quality will not be really acceptable. The excuse usually given for moving people on too fast is that they will get bored otherwise. I've never known anyone get bored when they have a challenge on hand (like learning to hear your bell all through call changes, lead properly, etc.... before trying to make continuous places, do dodging practice...before trying plain hunt,.....or whatever.) Actually the first move-on-too-fast that most people are subjected to is giving up silenced one-to-one bell control practice far too early. This is usually because tutors aren't prepared to give the time. That's assuming they get any at all!

Alison Barnett replies, at a nearby tower the absolute reverse has happened with learners not being moved on fast enough. They came week after week, had a 3-minute ring, then sat playing their game boys then went home. Needless to say after over 3 months of this, when the summer came they were seen no more. A tower with no ringers has lost 2 lads. Another is getting only limited Plain Hunting when they could be advanced a lot further. Some learners in my experience, need moving on fairly quickly, and sometimes even benefit from the 'next stage' when the 'stage before' is proving a sticking point. Surely everyone has to be flexible, as, what's right for Peter is not always right for Paul! But the attitude that you must ring for 'x' number of months before going to 'y' is surely wrong, isn't it?

Catherine Lewis replies, I agree about going on to the next stage before the previous is perfect – it can help to make it clear why some issues are being fussed about, for one thing. If something is a sticking point, that's the time to use an alternative approach, not plough on regardless. In my experience things become sticking points precisely because they have been attempted too early - there are usually some "earlier" activities to be used to help. (That is if by this stage the learner isn't too discouraged to try them.) No one said anything about sticking at a stage for "x" months. We were discussing moving on when READY - however long or short a time that takes.

Peter Wenham writes, as they say in Australia, 'Too right!' And, IMO, age plays a large part. I have taught a young person from scratch to Cambridge minor inside twelvemonths (with a little help from others!). At the other end of the scale, a mature 'millennium' recruit took a full twelvemonths before being confident to ring rounds without a minder standing by 'just in case'. A person of considerable determination who finally succeeded!

Caroline Stevens adds, I've seen this work. A (married) couple at a tower I used to ring at were having a problem with learning bob doubles, they just seemed to be "stuck in rut"

making different mistakes each time they tried to ring and getting terribly frustrated. The TC suggested they look at and learn St Martins. They did and both rang a faultless plain course first time. They continued with this "new" method for a few weeks, learning what to do when a bob was called and improving their striking and went back to plain bob after a while and found no problems with it. I don't know what they ring now, if at all, as we have all moved away from that particular tower, but they certainly seemed happier with their ringing last time I saw them.

Speed of Progress.

Heather Peachey writes, I have followed this discussion with interest. The key point, in my opinion, is that any teacher of anything needs to know their pupils and be sensitive to their needs. Many points have been made, that in certain circumstances with certain learners are valid but no system works for everybody all the time. People can be put off through being rushed into a sense of permanent insecurity, and can equally be put off by being made to concentrate on just one skill for week after frustrating week, knowing that they cannot move on until it has been perfected. I endorse the comment that a sidestep into something else can offer relief and result in a marked improvement in the original exercise when it is revisited. I too have seen this work. My own general philosophy (which I try to stick by, but sometimes can't as no 2 practice nights are the same, having different quantities and combinations of people in varying states of humour and health) is to try to provide a mixture so that a learner on any practice night rings at least one thing they are very comfortable with and also something that offers a challenge. As well as quite stiff challenges, I try to be a bit inventive and get people to do things I am confident they will be able to do, but which are still new, so that they go away with a sense of achievement. This can be as simple as a raw recruit, early in their rounds ringing being asked to say "Stand" or asking someone to explain something they understand well to a learner less experienced than themselves (e.g. how to tie a rope up).

This is a brief summary of September's postings. If you would like any greater details on any of the points raised, please contact me.

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